PENNGROVE

JACK HABERER, Poultry Rancher, 9480 Willow Avenue

MIRIAM HUTCHINS, Interviewer, October 1988

MRS. ANITA HABERER

(In barn used for grain)

Jack: The grain, we used to buy it, build it ten, twelve foot high. The truck used to back in here. It was five sacks high. Then we'd carry it over, it wasn't far to carry it and we'd pile it up ten, twelve high. The wheat n' barley ...we dumped it in loose then, like bulk, but later on they did come up with bulk. Then see, but we were way ahead of 'em.

Miriam: The horses were never in this barn?

Jack: No...This was just for grain. I'll show you the chicken house.

(Movement to chicken house)

Jack: This is one of the original old chicken houses. We used to put a hundred, two hundred fifty in this house. But the little houses, they were smaller...we could only put about fifty in there.

Miriam: The chickens were basically...free?

Jack: We used to open the little trap door there and they could go outside and scratch and eat worms...whatever they wanted to do.

Miriam: The roosters?

Jack: They used them for the breeding. Nowadays they find out right away on the first day that a little one is going to be a

rooster. But, in the olden days they didn't find out until they were about two or three weeks old. You could see the little combs coming up.

(Movement out into yard)

Jack: Those two houses, the big buildings, they were the brooder houses. We'd buy the chicks, thousand or fifteen hundred, sometimes three thousand, and we have heaters in there and they grow up until they are about three months old, then we'd move them down to these big houses over here. Here I have calf pens I built on to them.

After the little houses, the bigger one here with the tin roof, that was the next size. These two or three here are bigger yet. In the 20's they started building bigger ones.

Jack: Up the road there was two boys, too. We were all so busy in those days that all the children who came home from school had to start gathering the eggs and doing light work around the ranch.

Jack: See how flexible [the willow branches] are. You can tie anything with them.

Miriam: You can make baskets with them.

Jack: You can make baskets. You can tie the grapes up with them. They are real flexible when you cut them now. You let them dry and before you use them put them in water and they get

soft. Then you can tie them up good, make baskets or whatever you want to do.

Miriam: Can you tell us again when you planted the redwood trees?

Jack: I think in around 1950...52. I went up the river n' got a load of sand or gravel, I seen a whole bunch of little ones where they graded the road about six or eight inches tall. So I went and pulled about half a dozen. I stuck 'em in the gravel in the back of the truck and when I come home I planted 'em and here they are today. It was a rainy day when I went up there; the ground was real soft and all, so they were easy to pull out.

Jack: Those little chicken houses, or colony houses they were called, they are built on two by eights and usually have a hole drilled in each end of them and years ago you used to hitch a horse onto 'em or a team of horses. You didn't need to clean 'em you just pulled 'em into another spot. So that was the easy way in those days. Built on a sled.

Jack: Well there was just half of this house. When they bought it they built that back room on there. So that was where I was born. Started in there anyway. The first five years I lived in there. Afterward they built the other house. We just used it for an old egg house. Now it's just a storage house.

The tank house there it used to have a windmill up on top.

It used to turn and pump the water up. It would go up and down and pump the water up in the tank. It's about a two thousand gallon tank up there. When it was full, you see that little thing on the side there that would come all the way down on that little board, and when it was full it would come all the way down to the bottom before the tank would start running over, but you had a brake on the windmill so you could stop it when it was full. The water was up there and it came down again as gravity flow and that was your pressure.

Miriam: So then your parents built the front house?

Jack: In 1927.

Miriam: Did your dad build it or did he have someone else...?

Jack: No, he had a contractor. But in those days you can build a whole house for what half a room costs today.

Miriam: So as a small child you'd walk from this house just like the kids do today, walk from this house to the school.

Jack: Yes.

Miriam: We talked a lot about the school but we didn't get any of it on tape. I was wondering if you'd tell me something about being a boy growing up in Penngrove and walking to the school and along the railroad tracks. I guess that what intrigues me so and why I want to talk to you is that the kids still have that experience like you did. So what was it like being a child?

Jack: Well I had to walk the whole way and it's over two miles. When you walk the real road, but I always had a couple of short

cuts. Well, in the winter you couldn't use them as much, 'cause the back end was a creek and it was running; it was flooding a little bit back then. Besides you would get wet shoes to go to school; wouldn't be too good. But I went on the railroad track and that was just a mile and a block, you could say. But if you walked the other way it was over two, pretty close to two and a half miles.

Miriam: So did a lot of the kids come on buses or where did they come from?

Jack: They didn't have buses in those days. When they got bigger, they had a bicycle. Some of them, their folks brought them but most of them had to walk, years ago to Penngrove.

Miriam: How many children were in the school at that time?

Jack: Each room had about 25, 30, 32 or something. My class had sometimes 32; sometimes it had 29. Some people moved in some moved out. It was always a little different.

Miriam: So you were saying the school was built just about the same time you were born? Is that right?

Jack: Yes, but it was just about five or six years old when I started school so it was a new school yet.

Miriam: I like what you were saying when they don't let the kids in the school now because it is not earthquake safe. You were telling me that you had a few earthquakes when you were there.

Jack: Yeah, it never fell down in the last sixty years I guess.

Jack: I just want to tell you, if we could go back to history

again. Like the old days when the trains were running. The school children when they got into junior high or high school they had to go to Petaluma. So they all had to walk to Penngrove and the depot and then the train took them to Petaluma to the depot and then they had to walk from the depot all the way up to where the school is today.

In my days they had for the high school a bus. But I had to walk up to the highway here to catch it. For the real old timers; they had the walk first to Penngrove and then they had to take the train.

Miriam: So we were talking about downtown Penngrove. I keep thinking about the baker with the brick oven. I wish he was still there. What was downtown Penngrove like? You described it like such a bustling little town.

Jack: Yeah. It was a busy town in horse-and-buggy days; they did pretty near all their business in Penngrove. They got their feed there, and they brought the eggs down there. They even did shopping because Petaluma was too far to go with the horse and buggy. They did go, but it took over half a day to go and come back again.

Miriam: Which of the buildings were up there that are still there?

Jack: Well the bank was built in the early 20's. But before the bank the building next to the bank was down below on the other side but they moved it up there where it is in the present time. The bottom part was used as an office and the butcher market.

But upstairs was a big dance hall but they never used it. Us kids used to go up there once a week; we had permission, and we'd play soccer or something like that up there. It wasn't used for maybe fifty years; finally they made apartments out of it, and it looks real good now.

Miriam: Just beyond the grocery store there is a...

Jack: Big tin building. The first was that grocery store, and a feed store and an egg store, they buy eggs there. Then after the early 20's they built that big warehouse below that, that was the Ronsheimer building. After that Poultry Producers started in so the Ronsheimers sold it to the Poultry Producers. Beyond that is another little barn back there, but that was used only for a hay barn. But the other ones were for buying feed there and you would bring the eggs there. Then they would haul them from there to Petaluma, on the train.

The bakery...You know where the bank is today. Well, it's the first building on the left as you start going down the hill there. I don't know what's in it today. There's a realtor or some'n in there.

On the right side there was the saloon today and there was a barber shop and a shoe repair shop. Below that was a post office, all in that little building. Across from the bakery.

Miriam: You know that antique store that has the wooden sidewalk, you know the one right as you come into town, I guess it's for sale.

Jack: Oh yeah. That one was built in the early 20's too. There

they used to buy chickens and stuff. Upstairs was a dance hall, but it never turned out to be profitable I guess. For years it was practically empty. Downstairs was a couple of old poultry dealers, that's where you brought the poultry. But today it's an antique shop and apartments.

Miriam: Were there wood sidewalks all through town like that?

Jack: Well that had a balcony or a loading platform in front. I'm talking about the road that goes back there. On the right side was two buildings, little buildings, and one was a sheet metal shop and the other was a plumber. They were there for years, but they went out of business and they tore the building down I guess.

There was a little porch on the building and there was a railing along there, so you parked your horse there and you tied them onto the railing.

Mrs. Haberer: While you did the shopping.

Jack: While they did their shopping.

Miriam: So when did your parents get their first horseless carriage? Their first car?

Jack: I think they said in 1922. They bought their first one and after they bought a truck. A Model "T", that was I guess in 1924. But we still kept the horse for plowing and clean chicken houses and to do everything we had to do around the ranch. But we never took him on the road anymore.

When I bought the first tractor, we kept the horse about another year. So we finally decided to get rid of it. That was

in about '48.

Miriam: So what kind of mischief did a farm boy who had all these responsibilities get into?

Mrs. Haberer: He broke a horse when he wasn't supposed to.

Miriam: Oh! Tell me that story.

Jack: Well one day we had way down below we had the pasture, so I had to take the horse down to the pasture. But instead I just jumped on its back it had no halter no nothing, I just jumped on its back it started to trot and when it got about half way down, I slipped off and the horse stepped on my arm. Nobody was suppose to know it. I just held my arm for about three or four days kind of funny and so when I went to school it wasn't as noticeable as much, but it finally got okay. It didn't break, but it sure felt like it was broken.

Miriam: And your parents never found out?

Jack: No. (laughter)

Miriam: The old Model "T"? Did you have to crank the old Model "T"?

Jack: Well we didn't have to, but a lot of the time the battery was dead so we had to crank it. It would start then but otherwise the starter wouldn't turn it, so we had to crank it.

Mrs. Haberer: Is that when you hurt your hand again?

Jack: No. That was another time my dad was fixing something on it and it wasn't ready to be started yet, but I cranked it anyway, and it kicked and broke my arm. And I grabbed my arm and

set it already, and when we got to the doctor he said it was set perfect. And so he just put a cast around it.

Miriam: I like what Anita said about to be a farmer in those days you had to do everything.

Jack: Well, a lot of times you could buy the medicine and then sometime we just used common sense. Like one time. The horse kicked my dog and he made a big gash in his leg, big scar, about this size, and my mother got a needle and a thread and she sewed it up and the dog was okay.

Miriam: Did the chickens not get sick the way they do now?

Jack: Oh yeah they got sick. Before they had vaccine the chickens got chicken pox, they got...what was that...bronchitis. You lost sometime pretty near half of 'em because there was no treatment; there was nothing.

Miriam: So you would lose, that would just be your income.

Jack: Well, it took just two to three weeks until they got over it. But they would stop laying and you didn't get many eggs no more. We lost pretty near half of those.

Jack: Years ago they get only about 275 eggs a year; now they get almost 360. But the chickens don't last too long. They are forced too much today, so they produce heavy but they die quicker, and you have to get rid of them quick.

Miriam: You were talking about the railroad and the role that the railroad played. It always ran on your property and your parents' property? The railroad?

Jack: In the back of it, yeah.

Miriam: So it was there when they moved here?

Jack: Yes. I don't know, the railroad was put in in 1870? 1880?

Mrs. Haberer: But now...a number of years ago they put in the aqueducts.

Jack: Yeah, they put in the big aqueduct what goes down to Petaluma and Novato. About a three foot tube there; it's right on the other side of the railroad track. And that water is pumped from the Russian River way down here.

Jack: The egg scales. In those days we had to clean the eggs and we had to weigh them, before we sold them. So you had about three grades, I guess. Extra large, and large and small and you had to brush them by hand with a brush or wipe them with a wet cloth, to clean them, so that was quite a chore years ago; it took pretty near a third of the day to do it. With all the eggs we had. It kept my mother busy; and when we didn't have nothing to do, we came in and helped her.

Miriam: And how do you tell the large eggs, the small eggs?

Jack: Yeah, the balance of the large one, the scale went way down and we had a little grate to put on there. Flip it over and that was for mediums and then the small it didn't move the scale. They were light.

Miriam: How often would your parents take the eggs down to the station?

Jack: Oh, we took the eggs down about three times a week to Penngrove. Most of the time it was like Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. And the same time we did a little shopping in Penngrove. That's how Penngrove was busy in those days. We didn't have, we didn't go maybe every two weeks to Petaluma or maybe once a month sometimes. We didn't go twice a day like people do today.

Jack: (describing his parents' move from San Francisco to Penngrove) Well when they wanted to move, they ordered a moving van but that was just a wagon. In those days. It was pulled to their house with horses, a couple of horses. Then they loaded the furniture up, and then they pulled it down to sea, and then they met the Steamer Gold, I guess it was. And they pulled the wagon on the ferry and then the horses stayed in San Francisco. So when they arrived in Petaluma, they pulled the wagon off again with a couple of horses and they pulled it up to the ranch so they could unload their furniture, and then when they were unloaded they pulled down to Petaluma again, but I don't know what they did with it. They must have put it back on the steamer, the wagon, or something.

Miriam: All this furniture came from Europe to San Francisco?

Jack: No. No. From San Francisco up to the ranch.

Miriam: They came from Europe, they didn't bring...

Jack: No. They didn't bring nothing but their suitcase. They maybe had a trunk. They started their life here. He was a machinist. But in those days machinists didn't make much money.

They made two or three dollars a day; they were top paid and a few were not top paid. Some people only made a dollar a day. It was kind of a tough going anyway.

Jack: Yes, as a kid I got up early and we did ranch work here then as a kid you never had nothing to do; you know you were always looking for more to do. I went sometimes to a neighbor or a friend and helped clean chicken houses there, and then in Penngrove there was a prune-packing place there, so I had to operate the steam boiler to make boiling hot water and dip the prunes in, and then when you dipped them in you had to put them into another kettle to steam them. You left them in there for about ten to fifteen minutes, and then afterwards you dumped them out and they dried.

Miriam: So where were they grown?

Jack: Oh, they were grown up in Healdsburg. I went up there a couple of times and got a load up there. But then after, they had about ten ladies down here to pack 'em. They made little squares. You probably have seen them in the grocery store sometime, and figs too. You know when they are flat and about so thick; that's what they were doing. They had to press them, not heavy pressing, just enough pressing and then they put paper around it and that was the job.

Jack: One time they had olive trees up on the hill there, there are still a few olive trees up there.

There used to be apple trees next door. Now those old pear trees are still standing, they must be about 80, 90 years old, but they are just about falling over now. Every year we get a little box of pears out of them.

Yeah, the soil is different up in Sebastopol than ours, most of the places around Penngrove and Cotati there's a hard pan two or three foot deep so the roots can't go down. Probably it's not hot enough here either.

Well they had a road going over there (to Sebastopol), but we never went until the folks had a car. So then we could go over there, but the road going, the Old Adobe Road was pretty zig-zaggy and you couldn't go very fast. I believe it was even a dirt road in the beginning. Like all the roads around here, they are paved; but years ago they were dirt roads. Sometimes some of these farmers would run over it with their harrows or something to break up the road a little to level it off again and fill the holes up. I remember that they didn't probably get paved until the 30's around here. It wasn't so smooth; kind of dusty.

Miriam: So this was never considered good farming land, more like ranching.

Jack: Well farming is alright, but you know raising hay, and cattle is alright but not fruit and all that stuff.

Jack: (talking about childhood) My mother made some toys. She took a sock and filled it up with cotton or something like that sewed a couple of eyes on it and a nose and a mouth. That was

suppose to be a doll or something. You played with those kind of toys.

Jack: The whole front area here was planted with kale. For the chickens, for greens for the chickens. Every year we had to plow the whole field, and we had to plant just like this broccoli out here it looked. We did it every spring. We had to irrigate it through the summer months to keep it growing. Every day we had to pick the leaves off, and we used to have a chopper back here, and we'd chop it up and each house got a bucket, five gallon bucket or two, I don't really remember anymore. The chickens really went for it, and besides it helped in feeding them, but today you don't do that anymore. They say they have it all in the mash but I doubt it. It was a cheaper way of feeding too. The greens didn't cost too much.

Miriam: Will the creek be there this winter?

Jack: Well there's still water today yet down there. It's the one that runs through Penngrove. It starts way over in the hills, but it comes down through here at the railroad tracks, goes under the railroad tracks I mean and twirls around and goes to Penngrove. But anyhow years ago, I don't know how old ten, twelve, maybe younger, maybe older, I had a couple of buddies and they come over here and we'd go down there, we'd go swimming because there was no swimming pool no place, not in Petaluma not in Santa Rosa. So all through the summer they would come here. They'd come her sometimes it would be a rainy day just like today

it would start raining and we were swimming. By noontime sometime when we had an hour to eat, you know, we snuck off the school in Penngrove and we walked down to the railroad track and walked up the railroad track a little ways and we knew a nice place there was to swim. So, we went swimming in there on our lunch hour. So, after...I mean we timed it enough we could make it back to school. So, we all come packing back to school, wet, you know. So we did that for a few weeks and finally the teachers asked, "What's the matter with you? How come you're wet?" We were not allowed to do that anymore.

Jack: (talking about the Depression) Well I guess it was in the end of the 20's, into the 30's. You didn't get no welfare no help or nothing, from the county or government. So the families were so poor for a while, so the wife and her kids sometimes moved in with her folks, and the husband went out to look for work so he went out as a hobo because that was all he could do...He put a pack on the back and his blankets and what he could carry. And he walked along the railroad track and looked for work. So, down here on the railroad track where the creek runs under they would have water, the pond was there, so they'd dig a hole right a foot or two away from the water and it would seep over and they would use that water for cooking and drinking. So, they had water, so this was a real camp out for them fellas. In those early days they go around begging for food just to survive.

You probably heard about the CCC. They got a dollar a day.

They had to do little county projects. So, the fellas, lot of young fellas mostly, went in those places. They gave them board and room and a dollar a day.

(End of Tape)